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Citation for published version:

Sharma, J, Sharma, A & Kapilashrami, A 2021, 'Covid-19 and the precarity of low-income migrant workers in Indian cities', *Society and Culture in South Asia*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 48-62.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2393861720975618>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/2393861720975618](https://doi.org/10.1177/2393861720975618)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Society and Culture in South Asia

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COVID-19 and the Precarity of Low-income Migrant Workers in Indian Cities

Society and Culture in South Asia
7(1) 48–62, 2021
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DOI: 10.1177/2393861720975618
journals.sagepub.com/home/scs



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Abstract

Indian cities attract a considerable number of low-income migrants from marginal rural households experiencing difficult economic, political and social conditions at home. Based on fieldwork in Jalandhar and Guwahati, this article focuses on the precarity of low-income migrants in Indian cities. It argues that the concept of precarity, used in the context of migrant labour, should be extended to capture multiple and reinforcing forms of vulnerability, examining the relationship between structural inequalities, including difficult conditions at home, exclusion from public services and poor access to justice. It puts forward a proposition that the widespread media representations of migrant workers returning home in the context of COVID-19 are not simply a result of the sudden outbreak of the coronavirus but that these journeys must be seen as part of the history of the circulatory system of labour.

Keywords

Ethnography, labour, migration studies, precarity

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Introduction

On 24 March 2020, following the outbreak of the coronavirus, the Government of India announced a nationwide lockdown, with only 4 hours of advance notice. Since then, images and reports of tens and thousands of distressed migrant workers attempting to make long journeys home by foot, stranded in transport hubs and border points, and those left to die, being humiliated and ill-treated have been widely circulated in media. This *sudden visibility* of ‘millions’ of migrant workers has inspired a large number of reflections from activists, scholars and commentators highlighting the humanitarian crisis (see, e.g., Kapilashrami et al. 2020; Samaddar 2020). Yet, despite severe restrictions on mobility and loss of economic activities due to the lockdown, many migrant workers did not resort to the desperate journey back home. Many, if not most, stayed behind and chose to travel once the lockdown conditions relaxed, using the available means like Shramik Special trains.

In this article, we review and reflect on the social and economic lives of these low-income migrant workers in Indian cities, in the light of fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2019 in Guwahati (Assam) and Jalandhar (Punjab), two of India’s fastest-growing cities. In our research,¹ we focused on their migration journeys, working and living conditions, access to services, including healthcare, social networks, exposure to ill-treatment and access to justice. Drawing on our empirical findings, we put forward the following two related arguments.

First, circulation between the village and the city is a key feature of migrant labourers who come to the city in search of economic security, leaving behind their family, social network and land in the village. With the insecurity of work and limited social-support network in the city, going home is an obvious response for many low-income migrant workers. Yet, any return to the village is temporary. Many bring their family and build social support systems and invest in their future in the city while continuing to maintain a socio-economic and political life in their village. Thus, for these migrant workers, the decision to return home or stay behind in the city is not simply a result of the sudden outbreak

¹ This article results from research funded by the ESRC-ICSSR Call for Collaborative Research on Urban Transformations in India, ES/R006997/1, under the title ‘From the Margins: Exploring Low-Income Migrant Workers’ Access to Basic Services and Protection in the Context of India’s Urban Transformation’. The project team includes partners at Delhi University (India), North-East Network (India) and the University of Edinburgh. We thank Patricia Jeffery, Radhika Chopra and Bharti Kumari for their comments on an early draft of this article. Neither ESRC-ICSSR nor any of the partner institutions are responsible for the views advanced here.

of the coronavirus but reflects their broader aspirations, social networks and precarity in both the city and the village. In a way, we argue that migrants face an extreme and adverse situation in the city every day, not just during the lockdown.

Second, we argue that the concept of precarity should be extended to capture multiple and reinforcing forms of vulnerability, combining the system of circulatory labour between the village and the city, insecure and exploitative work and livelihoods, poor living and working conditions, exclusion from public services and limited protection from violence and discrimination. Thus, precarity allows for a synoptic analysis of the relationship between structural inequalities, exclusion from public services and poor access to justice.

Conceptual Background

The circular movement of millions of men and women from the countryside to towns and cities to perform jobs at the lowest end of labour value chains is one of the spectacular features of India's political economy (Ruparelia et al. 2011). Over the years, the circular labour migration has evolved into a permanent feature of Indian cities. Yet, cities have not reciprocated by offering these migrants access to decent work, basic services and protection from violence. Migrants remain neglected in national- and state-level planning (Kapilashrami et al. 2020) and are denied access to the basic amenities such as water, sanitation and healthcare even though they are critical to the maintenance of these amenities for local populations (Kusuma and Babu 2018). In the broader literature, the concept of precarity has been widely used to talk about economic insecurity in the context of the impact of neoliberalism in the employment and labour market (Standing 2011). Yet, precarious work goes hand in hand with ill health, intermittent access to basic services, widespread discrimination and ill-treatment, combined with an inability to demand rights and justice.

With its origin in the context of the Global North, the concept of precarity has been used to talk about the changing conditions of the global economies which have led to growing uncertainty, systematic exploitation and increased marginalisation from the loss of economic and social protection and rights. Yet, as Piper et al. (2017) remind us, such a condition of labour is hardly new in the Asian context. They argue that the concept may have limited applicability in the context of Asia where a different history of capitalist development has largely prevented the development of the social protection system in the first place. In the Indian context, informality of labour has been a norm (Bremen

1996). Throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods, from the vantage point of migrant labour, precarity has been an existing economic reality. Rather than migrant women, men and children being drawn into precious labour in the cities, migrant workers' journey to the city has been a livelihood strategy undertaken to mitigate precarity in rural areas (Piper et al. 2017). Historical and ethnographic evidence has established that Indian cities attract a considerable number of low-income migrants from marginal rural households (Banerjee 2014; Breman 1996, 2003; Samaddar 2016; Sharma 2018).

Despite migrants' ubiquitous contribution to urban development, they are excluded from the promises of citizenship (Breman 2003). Language and cultural differences expose many low-income migrants from interior parts of the country or across the border to harassment and political exclusion (McDuie-Ra 2012). Housing for many remains transient, crowded and informally arranged, with intermittent access to water and sanitation facilities making them vulnerable to malnutrition and diseases (Babu et al. 2017).

Low-income migrants are mobile, dispersed and invisible. Despite their ubiquitous presence, their precarious livelihoods and informality keep them invisible in the eyes of service providers and human rights organisations. When urban planners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and human rights organisations attempt to reach out to poor urban migrants, they often assume that 'places' like slums are an appropriate entry point. Such an approach is based on a limited understanding of the economic and social lives of migrants, especially those involved in the petty-trade informal economy and construction workers, who do not necessarily have a fixed address and therefore remain in the margins of welfare interventions.

In this article, we engage with the concept of precarity, which offers a useful framing beyond its widespread use in the context of the employment and labour market in the context of the neoliberal city. For us, a key merit of using the concept of precarity of migrant-worker populations lies in its synoptic framing to grasp multiple and reinforcing forms of vulnerability, combining the system of circulatory labour (Burawoy 1976), insecure and exploitative work and livelihoods, poor living and working conditions, exclusion from public services and limited protection from violence and discrimination.

Context of Fieldwork Sites

Jalandhar is a city well known for trade and industry in Punjab. Estimates suggest that migrants form 25% of Jalandhar's population of 900,000.

Jalandhar has a long history of transnational out-migration. With one of the oldest military cantonments established in the mid-nineteenth century, it attracts a wide range of labour, including those from nearby rural areas, low-income migrants from other underdeveloped states, such as Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh (MP), and Nepal. Today, as a centre for military recruitment and sports and leather goods manufacture, and as the headquarters of major Punjabi newspapers, Jalandhar attracts low-income migrants. Work in factories, vending, daily-wage/construction work and jobs in *dhabas* and restaurants remain the major sources of employment for migrant men. Migrant women, on the other hand, rely mostly on domestic work and home-based piece work, like stitching footballs. Although migrant populations can be found in almost all parts of the city, there are some clusters around the industrial hubs like Focal Point and Leather Complex. Both these areas have well-established markets, as well as residential units, which are dominated by migrant populations. Unlike in Guwahati, where the migrant question has been contentious, Jalandhar has not been characterised by a violent backlash against incoming migrant labour, although prejudices against them are widespread.

Guwahati is a major economic hub for India's north-east region. The 2011 national census suggests that its population is around 1 million (about 15% of Assam's urban population). Historically, Guwahati attracted migrants from rural Assam and Northeast India more generally, and from elsewhere in India (e.g., Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan and UP), and cross-border migrants (e.g., from Nepal and Bangladesh). In the colonial period, migrants were brought to Assam to work in plantations and settled in wastelands. Labour demands in industries, the coal and oil fields, construction of roads and railway lines and other development activities also shaped migratory flows into Guwahati. More recently, the establishment of the Guwahati refinery in 1962, the construction of a bridge over the Brahmaputra and the shifting of the state capital from Shillong to Guwahati in 1972 contributed to Guwahati's urban transformation. Migrants here work as vendors, loaders, construction/daily-wage workers, helpers in restaurants and domestic workers. Factory work is available to a much lesser extent here than in Jalandhar. Many markets, like Fancy Bazaar, and the booming construction throughout the city rely heavily on migrant labour. Many Muslim migrant workers who come from the rural areas of Assam such as Dhubri, Barpeta and Nalbari districts are suspected by 'Guwahati residents' to be Bangladeshis. Labour chowks throughout the city see a large number of men and women waiting for work, and many remain unemployed at the end of their waiting. Migrants and 'non-natives' in

Assam have come under the spotlight following the recent legal and political developments around the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Research Methods

Our research involved ethnographic fieldwork with in-depth interviews, a brief survey and a visual participatory method of photovoice. We began by mapping low-income migrant workers, their clusters, occupations and residences and the infrastructure available for them. The mapping facilitated the finalisation of the locally specific fieldwork strategies for accessing low-income migrants. Our initial research phase involved ‘walking’ ethnographies, walking through places of work and bazaar streets and mapping the kinds of shops, work and labour available through seeing, talking, storytelling and short ‘cases’ or biographies.

Based on findings of the mapping process, we met low-income migrants via low-income migrants’ social networks to identify study participants, or through local NGOs. We conducted a short survey using a closed-ended questionnaire with 100 migrants in Jalandhar and 126 migrants in Guwahati, which included questions on basic demography, migratory status, working and living conditions, access to services and exposure to violence and protection.

These surveys provided the basis for selecting people with whom to explore the research questions in more depth through in-depth qualitative interviews (including repeat interviews), the development of ‘thick description’ in case studies and visual documentation. Such interviews were conducted with 40 migrants in Jalandhar and 52 migrants in Guwahati.² In each city, we conducted photovoice with two groups of four to six members each.³

Findings

In the following paragraphs, we reflect on low-income migrant workers’ precarious life beyond their *sudden visibility* in media following the

² While our larger sample included both men and women, in this article, we focus on our interviews with men.

³ While this article deals with male migrant workers, the broader project involved studying both male and female migrant workers. We are working on a couple of peer-reviewed articles that specifically deal with the gendered nature of precarity in times of a pandemic.

coronavirus outbreak. Our starting point is that migrant workers rely heavily on their circulation and networks back home for their survival in the city. They enter the city through social and economic networks and build upon these during their stay in the city. Migrants rely heavily on their networks to navigate the challenges of their life in a foreign land (*pardes*).

Below, we start by briefly discussing two themes that emerged from our fieldwork which highlight low-income migrant workers' precarity.

Circulation, Return and Home Visits

Migrant workers regularly go back to their villages. In Jalandhar, 66 (out of the 100) surveyed migrants visited their home one to two times in a year, and 16 went back once in a few years. In Guwahati, 26 (out of 126) went back home one to two times a year, and 60 went back more than three times a year.

These visits can be for health reasons, especially when healthcare in the city becomes unaffordable, for social security, for investing purposes, for social occasions, like a wedding or death, or for religious ceremonies and festivals. This is the most important way of their maintaining ties with their family back home. The duration of these visits is not fixed. Migrants usually go back in case there is a matter at home that needs to be attended to. But most times, they combine these with other non-urgent matters or occasions. If a migrant goes to attend a wedding, they might extend their stay to be at home during some festival or harvest season. Such extensions are common. Many migrants reported being called back to work by employers during their home visits. This uncertainty regarding the length of their absence from the city is well woven into all aspects of their life in the city, including their decision-making around jobs and contractual agreements. In light of these observations, it is more appropriate to call these journeys as home visits rather than return.

Our survey results show that most migrants in the city have been coming to the city for more than 10 years, indicating circulation between the city and the village. Out of the 100 surveyed migrant workers in Jalandhar, only 13 had come to the city in the last 1 year, and 80 had been in the city for more than 10 years. Similarly, in Guwahati, 8 out of the 126 had come to the city in the last 1 year, and 101 had been in the city for more than 10 years. Over the years, migrants develop social and economic networks in the city which are critical for their survival and aspirations for the future. Many spoke about the aspiration to own a

house in the city and have invested in the same. In Guwahati, 46 migrants had families with them, and in Jalandhar, 59 had a family with them. In this sense, a significant number of the surveyed migrants had brought their family with them.

Making regular home visits is harder for those with their family in the city and children studying in schools. There is a larger gap between visits among them, and these are reserved for important occasions. Instead of taking their entire family, many male migrants prefer to go home alone for a visit.

One major uncertainty for a large number of migrant families is choosing whether to stay in the city or to go back home. In the case of single male migrants engaged in circular migration in the city, the choice is somewhat already made. They would return home at the end of their working age, where their wife and children are with the rest of their family. These are the migrants with the most pronounced precarity in the city, as they are in the city to earn. In the case of those with families and children in the city, home visits and returns have to be carefully planned. The children may want to stay in the city, or the family may have paid rent in advance; many migrants have developed and maintained social and economic support systems in the city. Visiting home can be tough even during normal times. Trains are crowded, ill-treatment is widespread, costs can be high and looting is a common experience. While critical for their circularity and multi-locality, home visits have significant implications in terms of their livelihoods.

Migrant workers do not wish to visit home without any savings. Despite not getting work, some migrants we spoke to did not seem eager to visit home until they were able to make some savings. A young man who worked as a daily-wage labourer in Guwahati spoke about how despite not getting work for the last several days he was finding it difficult to return home for Eid. He said, 'my wife can understand but how will my children understand; they cannot understand and they get hungry and they need to be fed'. He was hopeful that he would be able to find work for a few days before he went home for Eid.

Migrants we interviewed spoke about a lack of job opportunities back in the village and saw their journey in terms of earning, filling their stomach (*pet bharne ke liye*) and supporting their family. Most spoke about not having sufficient land or the opportunity to earn in the village. A few spoke about constant flooding. While most had heard of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) scheme, only a few spoke about benefits from it. A man from Bihar who worked as a loader in a fruit market in Guwahati said that he had made 'the card', as

people (*log*) had asked him to make one, but had not benefitted from it. He feels that people just give work to their own people. Commenting on the difficulty in getting a job in the village, another migrant, a man from UP who worked as a construction worker in Jalandhar, said, 'Village chief does not let any scheme get out to the people (*pardhan kha jaate hain*.) Schemes' benefit only goes to select favourites, not to the poor'.

A man from Gorakhpur who worked as a vegetable vendor spoke thus about the situation back in the village:

Before coming to Jalandhar 15 years ago, I had been in Delhi since the age of 12. Our family at that time was very stressed and poor. Our house's roof used to leak during rains. I had three sisters. We used to stay for extended periods at our relatives' place, especially maternal uncle. I wanted to leave and migrate for work, but my mother did not agree and forced me to stay. She had heard of incidents where migrant workers were beaten badly and their hands/feet are cut off. My mama used to make me work at his shop. He did not let me study, whereas his children were all studying and going to school. He used to beat me up with pliers, whenever I talked about studying. He would say that I am not supposed to study, I am to work at the shop, what would I do with education. I got so fed up with the situation that I stole money from my mother and ran away to Delhi with my friends, in search of work.

Another man from Nepal who worked in a factory in Jalandhar said he always saw his migration as temporary. He always thought that he would earn some money and go back to Nepal, but he has not been able to. Now chronically ill with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), he said, 'what will I do back in Nepal. Things are very expensive there when compared to Jalandhar; even tomato is 3–4 times expensive. I don't think I will be able to work and earn money to feed my family'. When we met him at his accommodation, he was on ART (antiretroviral therapy) and said that the benefit of staying in Jalandhar has been that he has not had to pay for healthcare and that his family were able to earn to feed and survive. He was not sure if he would be able to access medicine for free back home and was also concerned about the stigma associated with HIV.

Madhav, a 40-year-old Chamar man, lived in a rented room, in a *vehra*, in Phagwara (which is 20 km from Jalandhar) with his wife and two younger children (one son and one daughter). His two elder children stay in Bihar and go to the school in the village. He works in an iron-moulding factory in Phagwara from 8:30 AM to 7 PM, with no holidays, several days a week. He is paid in cash on a weekly basis. He makes roughly ₹10,000 per month. His work involves the melting of metal and exposure to high temperatures all the time. He goes home two to three

times a year. Some 15–18 years back, they did not have a toilet back in his rented accommodation and used to defecate in the open (*pehle shauchalya nahin tha*). His residence was on the periphery of the city, and agricultural fields were nearby. The farmers used to forbid them from defecating there. One day, he was going to his usual spot when he was cornered by the landowner and four to five other men (*char–paanch bhai baithe the*). They beat him up and warned him that he should not come there anymore. He has not told anyone about it—not even his family—because he thinks that what was bound to happen had happened (*kisi ko nahin bataye; hona tha ho gaya*). After the incident, he stopped going to that spot and started going somewhere else.

Widespread Ill-treatment

Migrants work harder and get paid less. Their vulnerability is rooted in the widespread ill-treatment that comes with their work but rarely ends with compensation and justice. Our findings suggest that low-income migrants are regularly exposed to abuse, discrimination and ill-treatment in the city. Migrants do not report instances of abuse or ill-treatment to the police, since they already know that they would not be listened to. In our quantitative survey, an overwhelming number of low-income migrants reported that they do not feel safe in the city. Out of the 126 surveyed migrants in Guwahati, 76 said that they do not feel safe in the city. In Jalandhar, 19 out of the 100 surveyed do not feel safe in the city. Likewise, a shockingly high number of low-income migrants said that they had been ill-treated in the city: 89 in Guwahati and 33 in Jalandhar said that they had been ill-treated in the last year.

Migrant workers are discriminated against and humiliated daily, in every aspect of their life in the city. One of the most common aspects of this discrimination is the labelling. Migrants from Hindi-speaking areas are referred to as *bhaiya* or *bhaiyarani* in Jalandhar. Similarly, Bengali-speaking Muslims are called *miya* and *miyani* in Guwahati. It should be noted that the labels for the males, that is, *bhaiya* and *miya*, are taken from the migrants' language and considered respectful in their language. However, when used for urban migrants, it assumes a derogatory connotation in the conversations, which is felt by the migrants. Many migrants spoke about having expressed a clear dislike for the word. These racialised and classed labels signify migrants as lowly labourers, carrying strong prejudices. For example, there is a widespread notion that migrants are work-shirkers and want to get money without doing

any work. This legitimises the idea that they need to be forced to work, whatever that takes. This ethnic-racial characterisation justifies and enhances migrants' structural, systemic and everyday ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation. Migrant workers we spoke to saw this ill-treatment as part and parcel of working in a foreign land which they have to tolerate to survive and earn in the city.

We met Balram at a labour union's office in Jalandhar, where Dev (union leader) fights labourers' cases on a pro bono basis. Balram looked around 35 years old. He was from Gorakhpur, UP. He had been working in a steel mill, making ball bearings. At the beginning of February 2018, he had an accident while operating machinery during work. Two fingers, as well as the thumb of his right hand, were heavily fractured. He was hospitalised and had to undergo medical treatment and surgery. Balram did not get any compensation. He was fired from work, and his due salary was not given. He also had to ask for money (₹30,000) from back home for his treatment. He contacted Dev through someone he knew.

Dev filed a case on Balram's behalf in the Labour Court. The employer first filed a reply in the court saying that Balram did not work for them. Balram had been working informally for the past many years. Dev had to provide covert testimonies from enlisted workers of the factories to prove that Balram had been working in the factory. The employer offered ₹50,000 as compensation. Dev refused to accept this amount and wanted the worker's proper dues to be paid.

Dev suggested Balram to get a medical certificate from Civil Hospital, which would mention the extent of the disability, for him to negotiate with the employer better. The doctor at Civil Hospital told Balram to get an X-ray, to verify it himself. After Balram got an X-Ray done, the doctor refused to give a certificate, saying that Balram's Aadhar Card address was not in Jalandhar. Balram had to get his Aadhar Card address changed, for which he had to get residence proof from his landlord. The process took weeks, and by the time his Aadhar Card got updated, the doctor at the hospital got transferred. Now, the new doctor asked for a new X-ray and then asked Balram why he should give him a medical certificate when the old doctor had not given him one. Thus, Balram did not get the medical certificate. The employer kept sending people to intimidate him for settlement and put pressure on him to not go to the Labour Court. Balram requested Dev to get his case settled before Diwali, so that he could send money home. But, Balaram never came back to Dev to settle the case.

We met Shyam, a 25-year-old young man from Tripura waiting for work in a labour chowk in Guwahati. He works as a carpenter. He came

to Guwahati 2 years ago and lives in the city with his wife and 2-month-old daughter, while his older daughter stays with her grandmother (Shyam's mother) in Tripura.

A few months before we interviewed him, he and his cousin (with whom he shares his accommodation) were picked up from the labour chowk by a man for some work in his house. They agreed on the amount of ₹1,200 for the job of fixing something (*kaam*), after bargaining with the employer. Shyam and his cousin initially wanted to do the job on a daily-wage (*haziri*) basis, but the employer wanted to set a fixed price for the job. Once they went to the employer's house, they completed the work, but then the employer asked them to do several additional jobs, including fixing windows, for the same wage, which they refused to do. The employer got very angry and told them he would not pay them until the additional work was done. They kept asking for the money, but the employer refused and asked them to 'go back'. He also threatened to beat them if they kept asking for their wage.

Ram, a man in his 40s, worked as a loader in a busy market area in Guwahati. He had left his family back home in Bihar and come to Guwahati to earn, as it is a common practice for men in his village to travel long distances to earn money. During our interview with him, while we were talking about experiences of ill health and health-seeking behaviour in Guwahati, an older man (another loader) approached us and listened in on our conversation that took place by a cart used by a loader for ferrying goods from shops. He commented that Ram had fallen sick 2 years ago and that the government hospital had asked for ₹20,000; he said 'they don't treat us *Biharis* well'. Only after this did Ram narrate his experience to us. He had run a very high fever while working in the bazaar. Initially, he went to a private clinic in the bazaar and spent about ₹3,000 on medication. As things did not get better, his friends/relatives took him to the government hospital. The doctor told him that he had dengue. The hospital staff said that he needed to be admitted to the hospital for a few days and that it would cost him around ₹20,000. Ram said, 'I didn't have that much of money as saving; it is a very large amount for someone like me. If I had saved money, I would send that home. They were trying to extort money from me here'. After consulting with his relatives and family, he went back to the village within 3–4 days.

Concluding Discussion

Our findings concur with other research that highlights the circulatory and precarious nature of migrant labour in India (Mohan 2017; Samaddar

2016; Shah and Lerche 2020). These cases show how low-income migrant workers' precarity is rooted not only in their multi-locality that sustains the system of labour (Burawoy 1976) but also in the exploitative and hazardous working conditions and different forms of ill-treatment and intimidation that they are subjected to in both the village and the city. The cases show that precarity is a regular part of migrants' life and not just in their workplace. Here, drawing on our findings from the survey and ethnographic fieldwork, we would like to highlight four key issues.

First, in an attempt to escape the difficult economic situation back in their village, migrant workers land in a precarious situation in cities. Thus, precarity does not just arise from their invisibility and insecurity (of work, healthcare) experienced in the cities but is embedded in their life in the village (that determines the circumstances of migration), their living conditions and their exposure to widespread ill-treatment in the city. However, vulnerability arising from such precarity heightens in the context of pandemic outbreaks (and other crises) where, on the one hand, imposed lockdowns could lead to a loss of livelihood and forced evictions from homes while, on the other, due to lack of safe transportation and special protection measures from the government, they are unable to travel back to their villages.

Second, as a result of their already-vulnerable position, migrant workers land in work settings and conditions that are highly exploitative. The piecemeal nature and insecurity of work and their exposure to hazardous working conditions (in factories and other manual jobs) contribute significantly to their and their family's ill health. Yet, their employers and contractual agreements at their workplace provide no social protection, leading to migrants incurring high costs of healthcare pushing them further into impoverishment and economic hardships.

Third, migrants' racialised and classed identity puts them in a vulnerable position to ill-treatment within cities and at their workplace.

Fourth, circulation and multi-locality are key features of their livelihood strategy and insurance to cope with precarity. Migrants rely on their scant networks in the cities (for loans, health seeking), as well as established networks in the village, to make ends meet. The above case vignettes highlight their dependency on the social and caring support provided by their family back in the village or in the city. These networks become fundamental to their social, economic and cultural lives in the city, and in maintaining their ties back home in the village.

In such a context, we put forward a proposition that the widespread media representations of migrant workers 'returning home' are not simply

a result of the sudden outbreak of the coronavirus but that these home visits must be seen as part of the history of an exploitative circulatory system of labour. Further, despite a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, many migrant workers with established familial, social and economic support networks in the city did not simply react by returning en masse to their village, as they had brought their children and family with them and aspired to build social and economic support systems in the city. Further studies are needed to understand the experiences and struggles of the migrant workers who stayed back in the city because they did not have any means or desire to go back to the village in the context of the pandemic and the lockdown that not only meant lack of work but also meant that there was no transportation system to enable their return, especially for those who had come from afar.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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